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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a brief account of recent trends in interlanguage studies. Interlanguage may be defined as a separate linguistic system which results from a learner's attempted production of a target language norm. According to the recreation hypothesis, this is a dynamic system of increasing complexity, whereas, according to the restructuring hypothesis, it is essentially the same in overall complexity over time. Interlanguage studies have concentrated on: (1) the dependence of the native language upon the acquisition of a target language; (2) the acquisition of the target language in developmental sequences; and (3) the types of strategies involved in language learning and language production. There exists a parallel between interlanguage and pidgins and creoles, in that their characteristics depend on function within a social setting. Other factors that should be taken into account in interlanguage analysis studies include age, personality, language attitudes, and situational, interactional, and cultural variables. (AM)

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INTERLANGUAGE AND INTERLANGUAGE STUDIES - A REPORT

Interlanguage studies was the central theme on one of seventeen Nordic Summer Institutes (Nordiska Forskerkurser) for 1977, financed by the Nordic Cultural Foundation (Nordisk Kulturfond). The course on interlanguage studies was held in Helsingør, Denmark, August 1st to 12th, with professor S. Pit Corder (Edinburgh), Dr. Jack C. Richards (Singapore), and Dr. Merrill Swain (Toronto) as invited experts on the subject. The five Nordic countries were represented by, in all, 25 participants, five of whom came from Finland.

The course consisted of:

(i) lectures by Corder, Richards, and Swain on areas closely related to interlanguage studies, such as error analysis, language learning and language-learning strategies, communication strategies, social and attitudinal aspects, simplicity and simplification, pidgins and creoles, performance variability, and methodology;

(ii) general seminars, guest lectures, and presentations of current Nordic immigrant-language and error-analysis projects;

(iii) small-group workshop-type exercises in analysis of errors and error gravity, functional analysis of interlanguage, elicitation techniques, etc.

The aim of this paper is to give a brief account of recent trends in interlanguage studies, and it may therefore be useful to start from the concept of interlanguage.

The concept was first referred to by Corder (1967) and subsequently termed* and further elaborated by Selinker (1969, 1972), who defined it as "a separate linguistic system ... which results from a learner's attempted production of a target language norm" (1972:214). Another attempt to describe the phenomenon was that by Nemser, in terms of "approximative systems" (1969). Although the term "dynamic system" (Bickerton 1975) was not available at that time, it is obvious that both Selinker's and Nemser's systems were dynamic in Bickerton's sense. They have, however, two important differences: whereas the term 'approximative systems' implies a continuum, Selinker's term does not. Furthermore, Selinker's concept lacks the property of increasing complexity or elaboration (Corder 1976). Rejecting his original hypothesis viewing the interlanguage continuum as non-developmental (Corder 1971), Corder now describes it as "a dynamic, goal-oriented language system of increasing compexity" (1976:4).

This recreation hypothesis of the interlanguage continuum as a dynamic system of increasing complexity - a characteristic shared by pre- and post-pidgin continua and the development of child native language into the standard norm - is, however, only one of two, not necessarily contradictory hypotheses concerning the nature of interlanguage. According to the restructuring hypothesis, on the other hand, the interlanguage continuum shows essentially the same overall complexity over time - cf. the historical change of language (Corder 1976).

In spite of theoretical and methodological problems and disagreements among linguists, a great number of interlanguage studies have been carried out recently. They have differed considerably in source of data as well as aim of study. Many different types of data-collecting techniques have been used, such as written compositions, translations, participant observation, questionnaires, recordings of free speech over periods of time, elicited imitation, and elicitation of intuitional data (cf. Richards & Kennedy 1977), partly depending on whether data is needed for

generating or testing of hypotheses.

As for aims, recent interlanguage studies may be grouped into three main categories:

(i) studies relating to whether the target language is acquired in developmental sequences - and whether these sequences are the same as in the native language - have frequently concentrated on either morphemes (e.g. Hakuta 1974, Larsen-Freeman 1976), auxiliaries (e.g. Cancino, Rosansky & Schumann 1975), or certain higher order structures (e.g. Selinker, Swain & Dumas 1975). (Also see Wode 1976 and Swain & Naiman 1976.);

(ii) studies relating to the dependence of the native language - or a third language - upon the acquisition of a target language, a question put forward in the late 1950's by Robert Lado and his colleagues. For discussions and research on this area, see e.g. Dulay and Burt (1976), Kennedy and Holmes (1976), and Kellerman (1977);

(iii) studies relating to the different types of strategies involved in language learning and language production - a distinction made by e.g. Richards and Sampson (1974). The corresponding strategies have been termed "learning strategies" and "production strategies" - or, where communication is the sole purpose for language production, "communication strategies" - by Tarone, Frauenfelder and Selinker (1976). Richards and Kennedy (1977) distinguish five major learning strategies: language transfer, overgeneralization, memorization, perceptual saliency, and attention to word order. Communication strategies, on the other hand, include the following: avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime (Tarone 1977).

It has been suggested that one such communication strategy is that of simplification (Richards 1975). Such a view, however, brings with it terminological problems. A language learner cannot, in any psychological sense, be said to simplify what he may not even possess (Corder 1975b). The result of many communication strategies - i.e. the interlanguage of the learner - is, on the other hand,

certainly often simpler in structure than the target language (cf. Mühlhäusler 1974). Native speakers, however, do at times make conscious attempts to simplify their speech in order to facilitate communication. Such simplification, which may be grammatical and/or rhetorical (cf. Corder 1975b), can be seen for example in baby talk - i.e. the kind of talk used by parents to babies (Ferguson 1964) - and foreigner talk - i.e. the talk used when addressing foreigners (Ferguson 1971).

The characteristics of interlanguage, in other words, also depend on its function within a social setting. Smith (1972) distinguishes three such major functions: communication, affirmation of social identity, and an expressive function. Therefore, when a learner's use of his interlanguage is restricted to communication, the result is seen as a simplified version of the target language. If, on the other hand, he wants to achieve higher social status, e.g. if he seeks integration into the target-language community, his interlanguage will grow more complex (Richards 1972). This phenomenon, referred to as "complexification" (Richards 1975) or "complication" (Corder 1975b), can also be found in child native-language acquisition.

The same is true of pidgins and creoles, described by Todd in the following way (1974:1-3): "A pidgin is a marginal language which arises to fulfil certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language ... The syntactic structure of the pidgin is less complex and less flexible than the structure of the languages which were in contact ... A creole arises when a pidgin becomes the mother tongue of a speech community. The simple structure that characterized the pidgin is carried over into the creole but since a creole, as a mother tongue, must be capable of expressing the whole range of human experience, the lexicon is expanded and frequently a more elaborated syntactic system evolves."

Since the main function of pidgins is restricted to communication, pidginization produces an interlanguage

which is simplified in outer form and reduced in inner form (Schumann 1975). When the pidgin becomes the native language of a speech community - i.e. a creole - it must serve language functions other than communication as well. Creolization, in other words, occurs with higher social and psychological needs. Since the same needs may account for the development of the native language in children and the target language in learners of that language, the study of pidginization and creolization may give useful insights into second-language acquisition (Corder 1975a, Schumann 1975).

Finally, also other factors - which unfortunately have been often neglected by linguists - exist that must be accounted for in the study of the nature of interlanguage. Such factors include the learner's age, personality and attitudes towards the target language and target-language community (Richards & Sampson 1974), together with the whole spectrum of situational, interactional and cultural variables than influence the use of the learner's interlanguage (Richards 1977).

The extent to which these different factors are taken and can be taken into consideration in on-going Nordic error-analysis and interlanguage-analysis projects is, however, a question worth returning to after the follow-up course planned to take place in Finland in 1979.

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* The term 'interlanguage' can, in fact, be traced back to a book written by John Reinecke in 1935, in which he uses the term referring to the pidgin language used as a lingua franca by immigrant workers on Hawaii (Reinecke 1969).

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